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ABSTRACT

TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) students are usually people who are in the process of assimilating a new language and culture and therefore require more than a superficial knowledge of the language. Adults learning English as a second language might be taught by a language experience approach. Building upon the learners' experiences and needs will help them relate to the community and to their social roles. The orientation of a group of second language learners should be reflected in the curriculum and its philosophy and methodology. Current research suggests that children and adults learning English as a second language use common strategies and process linguistic data in fundamentally similar ways. While it is not appropriate to use the same teaching methods with children and adults in a native language learning situation, some of the ideas that have worked with children learning a second language may be transferable to adults in the same situation. Various language tests and readability formulas are discussed. (LL)

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# PROBLEMS OF THE YOUNG ADULT AND MATURE READER OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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David A. Smith-Gold

Before discussing the problems of adult second language learners, we must define (what specific populations we will address). We in the field of TESOL make two broad distinctions in the large undifferentiated mass of second language learners, the speakers of English as a second language and the speakers of English as a foreign language. The former will be the focus of this paper. Kenneth Croft in his text Readings On English As A Second Language broadly defines these groups as follows: "In American usage TEFL usually refers to teaching English overseas or to foreigners who are more or less temporary residents in the United States, such as foreign students, visitors, or diplomatic people." He further states, "TESL on the other hand, has to do with the teaching of English to non-native speakers who are more or less permanent residents in the United States, such as Mexican-Americans, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, or Chinese Americans" (1972).

Differences in the teaching strategies between these two groups deal mainly with the differing goals the two group have. The TESL population is composed mostly of people who are in the process of assimilating a new language and culture. Their needs

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include a complex and complete understanding of English. They need more than survival skills. Individuals in the TEFL population need to develop a language usage that is more specific or technical in nature.

Adults learning English as a second language might be taught by a language experience approach. Building upon the learner's experiences and needs will help them relate to the community or to his or her social role. TEFL students, while still needing to communicate to people, will be relating usually to individuals in an academic or diplomatic community. They will have as an objective, the use of English for a more specialized purpose. Instruction for this group needs to be concentrated. It would include the teaching of a specific vocabulary or jargon. Whatever the case, the orientation of the group should be reflected in the curriculum, its philosophy and methodology.

Acculturation and assimilation are two major problems for any second language speaker. Many people experience "culture shock" when attempting to adapt to a new culture. Culture shock can be defined as the experience that an individual undergoes when he or she leaves the native environment and emigrates to a different cultural environment. The "shock" sets in when differing cultural patterns and assumptions come into conflict. The acculturation process depends on many factors. One of the basic considerations involves the degree of security or insecurity that an individual feels in his environment. In most cases, the

more foreign a person looks and acts, the more likely he or she will encounter hostility in dealing with the native populations. The effects of this hostility can be seen in the covert barriers of ethnic prejudice which separate that person from the predominant society (Language and Culture Institute, Rutgers University, 1974).

People of non-English speaking backgrounds who live in highly concentrated communities tend to become isolated from the predominant culture, this has its advantages and disadvantages. The longer they remain isolated, the more likely living in this circumstance will become a hinderance for social-educational and professional mobility. Contrary to what has been assumed in the past, social and religious groups for specific language-ethnic groups tend more to promote rather than inhabit assimilation and acculturation. Without these groups, individuals would be less apt to interact with any part of their community. Members of these social groups provide an initial insulation for these individuals, thus providing a more gradual immersion. By observing the behaviors of the members of these social groups, the incoming people get their first glimpse at the new culture, its values and mores. Individuals who do not have this opportunity could have an even slower more prolonged period before any meaningful amount of assimilation takes place. Some people may flounder, not being able to speak-interact with others, it remains difficult if not impossible to obtain more than a low level entry occupation. Some individuals in this group could enter a state of

anomie. These people may overact by adhering even more strongly to the mores of their original culture which is now seen in retrospect as ideal and perfect.

The Learning Process

No two people learn alike; how often have we heard these words? Yet, we often make assumptions about the learning style of one group and assume that the model or method for teaching one group will serve for a variety of others. Two groups that do not learn in the same ways are children and adults. While children are assimilating information in the development of a cognitive-linguistic base, adults have an elaborate store of knowledge and experiences upon which to reflect new information. Children are restricted in the types of associations they can produce. Their language and thought reflects their level of cognitive development, Sinclair-De-Zwart, (1969). Courtney Cazden (1972) sees the development of children as separate, unique and distinct from adults; she states that "one of the most dramatic findings of child language is that these stages show striking similarities from one child to another, but equally striking deviations from the adult model." In describing the differences between the structures of a child of 5 years of age and an adult, Chomsky (1969) stated that "we find that the grammar of a child of five differs in a number of significant respects from adult grammar, and that the gradual disappearance of these discrepancies can be traces as children exhibit

increased knowledge over the next four or five years of their development."

How about learners of English as a second language? Is there possibly a difference between these learners, be they children or adults, in their approach to language learning? In an attempt to understand the process of language learning for young second language learners, Burt, Dulay and Hernandez constructed the Bilingual Syntax Measure (1973). The test was designed to measure children's oral proficiency in English and/or Spanish grammatical structures. Data from their research indicated "that regardless of the native tongue, children learning English as a second language acquire the grammatical forms in an established sequence."

In a study by Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974) entitled Is There a Natural Sequence in Adult Second Language Learning? the authors investigated whether or not a hierarchy or sequence existed among adult learners along similar lines of children learning English as a second language. The Bilingual Syntax Measure was used in their research. The authors stated, "there is a highly consistent order of relative difficulty in the use of functions across different language backgrounds." Their findings also support those of Dulay and Burt (1973) who had used the test previously with 5 to 8 year old children. The authors suggest that children and adults learning English as a second language use common strategies and process linguistic data in fundametally

similar ways. Thus, while it is not appropriate to use the same teaching methods among children and adults in a native language learning situation, we might however transfer some of the ideas that have worked with children learning a second language to their adult counterparts.

Placement

A major problem in deciding college placement levels for groups of second language speakers is that even if groups are homogeneous in areas of age, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, there may be large disparities in their language level development. Criteria should be established for entrance and completion requirements at each level, in other words set clear behavioral objectives. Levels allow the students to have a realistic view of what is expected of them. Goals for any level should be realistic. Criteria should reflect the length of time established for the course or program and, in instances where the students will be expected to develop a level of proficiency in a specific number of terms, they should be told about the time limitation. If, after an initial screening, it is felt that a student could not possibly develop the necessary skills they should be advised to seek alternative programs. Examples of alternative programs are those offered in ABE and community colleges.

Testing

There are two types of test, standardized and teacher made. Standardized tests are developed and normed on a large population and the test focus on identifying specific information. Two standardized tests for second language adult populations are the Test of English as a Foreign Language TOEFL and the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. The TOEFL is usually administered to students in their native countries and the test scores then sent to institutions at which the students' are applying for admissions. The TOEFL scores provide an estimate of student's success in English. The Michigan Test assesses the individual's level of proficiency in the areas of English grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. Form A of this test provides a predictive scale for the amount of classes at the college level a student can handle successfully. The Michigan Test is usually administered by the college that is granting admission. Recent standardized tests are the Bilingual Syntax Measure (1973) which was mentioned earlier and the Structure Placement Test for Adults in English-Second-Language Programs in California developed by Donna Llyin (1970). This test is constructed to place beginning level adult ESL students into three classes.

From standardized tests we move to teacher made tests. Two teacher made tests are the Informal Reading Inventort (IRI) and the CLOZE. An IRI can be developed to obtain either very general or specific reading-language levels of development of students.

The IRI is a series of graded passages beginning usually at the pre-primer level. The test assesses the student's oral and silent reading abilities. The student reads the passages until he or she reaches their frustrational level. The IRI is diagnostic in that it can reveal, depending upon its construction and objectives, specific areas of difficulty in reading (Zintz, 1972). Two sub-tests which can be built into an IRI are the (SORT) from the Slosson Oral Reading Test and the vocabulary-pronunciation section of the (WRAT) Wide Range Achievement Test. The first test gives a rough vocabulary level placement and the second can provide a vocabulary and pronunciation level.

Some reasons why I recommend the use of an IRI are: (1) teacher-made tests are usually prepared, administered and scored by one person, (2) test objectives reflect the course content, (3) evaluations of student progress will be based upon several on going assessments. This last factor is important because one poor test performance will not do irreparable damage to a student's final evaluation, and (4) the teacher can adapt the test to provide a continual evaluation as well as using the test for a diagnostic review.

Even though an IRI gives an instructor several advantages over standardized tests, most ESL teachers have the problem of having a class enter at the beginning of a program with little

being known about them. The teacher needs to have a rough ball-park estimate of their student's language level. The CLOZE test can provide this (ruff) estimate. Zintz (1972) explains that "the term 'cloze' from the word "Clozure" explains the tendency of a thinking individual to anticipate the completion of a not quite finished pattern." Clozure represents an individual's ability to determine from an anticipated context, the remaining material, either the word or concept that is immediately needed.

Graded passages of between 250 and 300 words should be selected from materials which will be used in the program. Every fifth word should be deleted. It is not a common practice for CLOZE test in a non-ESL situation to delete either specific word classes, such as verbs, adverbs, or adjectives. It is also not the practice to substitute synonyms. Yet, these practices might prove profitable if the instructor is attempting to assess the student's ability to use certain English word forms.

Readability

How important is it for instructors to check the reading level of the books they are using? Knowing the reading level is important for two reasons: (1) it allows the teacher to develop informal inventories and other types of diagnostic tests and (2) it helps in the proper placement of student's instructional reading level. With proper placement, we can be relatively assured that we are not expecting them to read material too easy or difficult.

What then is the best readability formula available? In research by Samuel Weintraub (1974) it was reported that tests

on selected reading materials showed significant differences in the level of placement for the texts after they were evaluated by the most accepted readability formulas. No one formula is ideal. What is important is that an approximate readability level is obtained before imposing materials too difficult for the student's capabilities.

The Student's

Earlier in this paper, the discussion centered around the differences between the learning process among adults and children from both mono-lingual and second language environments. The differences mentioned in that section revolved around biological and physiological differences. There is another equally important factor which effects the learning of adults, this is the learning environment. All adults enter into a learning situation with a different perspective than that which is possible for any child. Donald Mocker (1975) refers to these differences by pointing out the conclusions of The Commission Of Professors Of Adult Education in 1961. The commission indicated that there were two significant differences between children and adults as learners: " 1) they (adults) enter an educational activity with a greater amount of experience from which they can relate new experiences, and 2) they enter with more specific and immediate plans for applying newly acquired knowledge."

These differences appear in several ways. When an adult enters a learning situation, it is usually because of a self-initiated response to improve their abilities; these advances could be for a

variety of social or economic reasons. Whatever the reasons for re-entering the formal educational world, this individual comes with a vast background of past experiences. The perspective is further affected in that the skills will have immediate application; the skills must meet the needs of the here and now.

There needs to be an equal sharing of ideas between student and student as well as between students and the instructor. The teacher can provide a model for assimilating ideas. They can also provide the necessary structure to (1) know what is being investigated, (2) how to go about defining how to go about the inquiry, (3) how to bring the information into focus, and (4) act as a catalysis to bring together the student with the new material. This is a sensitive intergration. Too much direction may foster dependence on the teacher. Not enough structure might produce a student who can not act independently, to know how to explore new information on their own.

A cooperative environment can be stimulated by the instructor having the students select materials they want to learn about. Unless the adults want to read the selected texts, no matter how interesting the instructor feels they are, the students will not be motivated to read them. Once a group of topics have been suggested, the instructor can collect material which will provide the desired information while also being aware of the level of sophistication of the readings. Even though some of the material is above the instructional level of the students, their motivation may help them overcome the difficulty factor

and they might be able to learn from it.

Two important skills needed by adult students are the ability to comprehend and make interpretations. A teacher has to provide a structure without being overly directive. This does not mean that the teacher does not provide a model, but its development must be derived from the student's interaction and manipulation with the information. Again, it is a sensitive balance, but the teacher should help the students synthesize ideas and come to an understanding of what a model is by asking questions in such a way that the solving of the questions leads the students to become aware of a study-learning system. It is also important that the instructor realize that they are influenced by their own cultural background. It is wrong to assume that their approach is the "right" way.

Mocker provides an example of the type of interaction I am suggesting. In a review of a group of reading selections the students should be asked "what are the possible consequences of these alternatives?" A record should be kept of the student's responses. The instructor may then ask the students to rank the alternatives in the order they feel is most plausible and realistic. The end product of this approach should be the formation of study-learning habits on the part of the adults that are integrated into rather than artificial factors of their learning style.

The motivation which brings the adult second language to the educational situation is crucial. Two important factors affecting cultural-language assimilation are student's attitude and motivation.

These two factors correlate highly with second-language learning success. Of these two, the most important variable is motivation. Two types of motivation are: instrumental in which the student wishes to learn the language in order to make some particular use of it and integrative in which the person learns in order to be able to know the world of the other language better, grow closer to its speakers and perhaps be more like them (Smith-Gold, 1974). The first type of motivation is usually characteristic of the learner of English as a foreign language. The second is indicative of the learner of English as a second language. But no matter how great the motivation of the student's, no matter how well the curriculum is planned, it will not succeed without the sincere dedication and sensitivity of those responsible for providing instruction. Teachers should be realistic and honest with themselves and their students. Each needs to share a joint commitment to the program and each other if anything worthwhile is to come of the program.

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